

NASS FEATURED MEMBER ARTICLE

**Thomas Scarice, Superintendent
Westport Public Schools
Westport, CT**

INTRODUCTION

Meet Thomas Scarice, Superintendent of Westport Public Schools in Westport, Connecticut. The district is nationally recognized for its academic excellence, vibrant arts programs, and deeply engaged, high-expectation community. It is a community defined not only by achievement, but by a commitment to innovation, intellectual rigor, and preparing students for an increasingly complex world.

Thomas's distinguished career in educational leadership, grounded in instructional excellence and systems thinking, has prepared him to lead at a transformative moment in public education. Known for his focus on continuous improvement and forward-thinking leadership, he has earned recognition as a model superintendent in the emerging space of artificial intelligence in education.

Under his leadership, Westport Public Schools is redefining what it means to be a high-performing district—advancing a bold vision to become AI-powered and human-centered, while ensuring that innovation strengthens, rather than diminishes, the human experience at the heart of teaching and learning.

Education

Thomas has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science from the University of Connecticut, a Master of Science in Educational Counseling from Southern Connecticut State University, and an Educational Leadership Administrator Certificate from Southern Connecticut State University.

Experience

His career reflects a progression of impactful leadership roles grounded in instructional excellence, systems thinking, and a deep commitment to student-centered practice. After beginning his career in Cheshire, Connecticut, Thomas quickly moved into leadership, supervising special education before being appointed middle school principal in East Hartford where he led innovative programming, including an early 1:1 technology initiative in a multi-district magnet school.

He later served as Assistant Superintendent in Weston Public Schools, and in 2012, he was appointed Superintendent of Madison Public Schools, where he served for eight years. In 2020, Thomas was selected as Superintendent of Westport Public Schools, where he currently serves.

Outstanding Achievements

Thomas has led a wide range of significant accomplishments throughout his career, including guiding school systems through the COVID-19 pandemic, implementing comprehensive strategic plans, and leading complex initiatives such as redistricting and long-term facilities planning. He has aligned curriculum, instruction, and operations to support high-quality teaching and learning, while fostering strong community engagement and building highly effective leadership teams.

In Westport, his leadership has been marked by the development of a bold, systemwide vision to become AI-powered and human-centered, positioning the district as a national leader in the thoughtful integration of artificial intelligence in education. This work includes establishing a districtwide AI Code of Ethics, developing a K–12 AI literacy framework, refreshing academic integrity practices, and investing in professional learning to empower educators.

While these accomplishments are substantial, Thomas views his most meaningful achievement as creating the conditions for others to thrive. He believes the true measure of leadership is the extent to which it empowers educators and students to grow, lead, and succeed.

As he often reflects, the work is not about individual recognition, but about maintaining a relentless focus on preparing students for the future while preserving the humanity at the heart of education.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS SCARICE

Tell us about how you see today's superintendent.

One of the defining realities of the modern superintendency is its complexity—it is no longer just about managing a school system, but about leading through constant change and uncertainty. The role demands clarity of vision in a time when the future is evolving faster than ever before.

In my view, one of the greatest challenges today is navigating the rapid advancement of technology, particularly artificial intelligence, while preserving the human core of education. Superintendents must not only be technologically fluent, but must also model its responsible and purposeful use, setting the tone for how systems adapt.

Equally important is communication. Stories matter. Today's superintendent must serve as a narrator for the system, helping the community understand not just what is happening, but why it matters. In a highly engaged and often demanding environment, building trust through transparency and clarity is essential. Storytelling is central to this.

Ultimately, today's superintendent must be both innovator and steward, driving transformation while ensuring that relationships, ethics, and humanity remain at the center of the work.

What new understandings did you acquire after two or three years on the job?

My most important realization was that the work is far less about having the right answers and far more about creating the conditions for the right thinking to emerge. Leadership at this level is grounded in trust, trust with the board, with faculty, with families, and with students. Without it, even the best ideas will not take hold.

I also came to understand that vision matters, but how you bring people to that vision matters even more. You have to listen deeply, invite diverse perspectives, including dissent, and build shared ownership. That requires patience, transparency, and a willingness to adapt.

Finally, I learned that in a rapidly changing world, particularly with advances in AI, leaders must model learning themselves. You cannot ask others to evolve if you are not evolving. The role demands both conviction and humility, holding a clear direction while remaining open to learning alongside the community you serve.

Share an idea to use or something you've learned with your colleagues.

One of the most important lessons I've learned is to lead with questions, not answers. In complex, rapidly changing environments, especially with AI, framing the right questions creates ownership, invites deeper thinking, and builds collective responsibility for the work.

I've also learned the importance of a "pull" over "push" approach. When people see value, feel supported, and are part of the process, momentum becomes authentic and sustainable.

Finally, model the change. If we expect our systems to evolve, we must be willing to learn, adapt, and lead visibly alongside those we serve.

Submitted by:

Name Date